

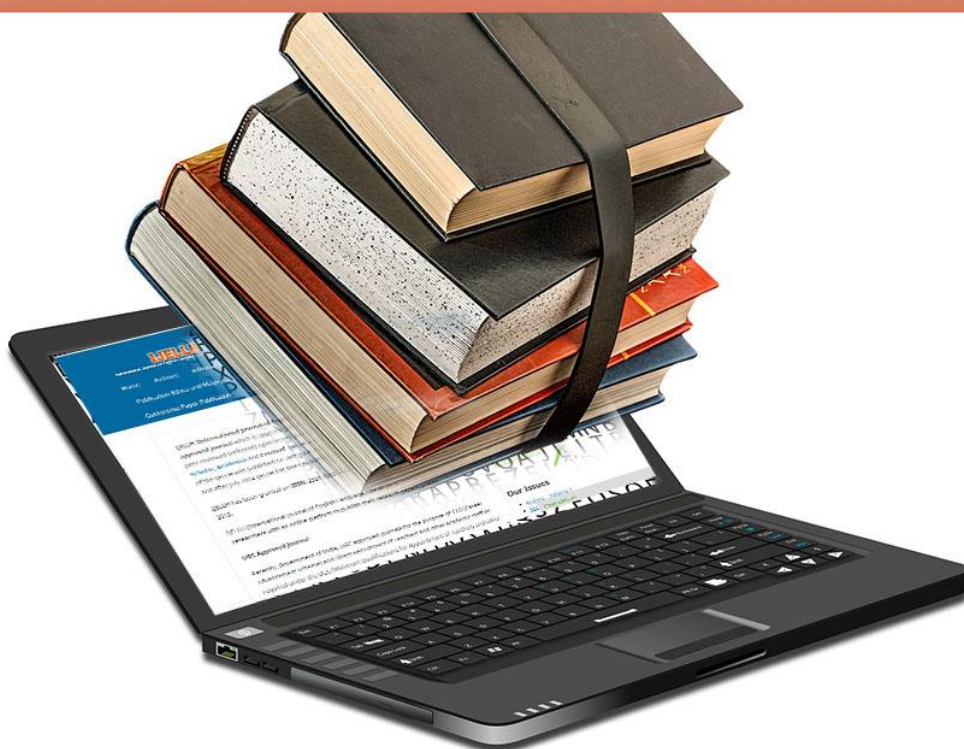
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Savithri- An Evolving Woman from Innocence to Matured Progressive in Kalki's

Thiyagaboomi (Land of Sacrifice)

R.Krishnamoorthy, who was writing in the pen name of Kalki was a praiseworthy Tamil novelist, a freedom fighter, social crusader, short story writer, journalist, humorist, satirist, travel writer, script-writer, poet, and film & music critic. His writings include over 120 short stories, 10 novelettes, five novels, three historical romances, editorial and political writings and hundreds of film and music reviews. His novel, *Thiyagaboomi* was written in 1938 and at that time, it was considered a revolutionary novel ever written in Tamil.

Story in brief

The story begins in 1918 in Neelangarai, a remote hamlet on the banks of Kudamuruti in Thanjavur district. It is a place where the low caste people were treated as untouchables. Sambu Sastrigal was a Brahmin priest who sheltered Harijans (people who are socially and economically underprivileged) as they had become homeless due to a cyclone. Sambu Ayyar was a landlord and lost his first wife. Savithri was born to his first wife. In order to look after the four year old child, he married Mangalam. She had a mother and a deaf brother Moorthy. Mangalam and her mother Sornammal had nourished deep aspirations about the prospects of enjoying Sambu Ayer's property after his death. As Sornammal's

financial status was very low, she was left with no option but to make her daughter become second wife to a middle aged man. In the context, poverty played a dominant role. But Sornammal failed to sharpen her daughter's cunningness in bringing Sambu Sastrigal to their hold. Sambusastri was a karmayogi. He had infinite faith in Lordess Parasakthi. He had no taste for carnal pleasure. He married Mangalam as a substitute mother to Savithri. He needed servants at home to look after domestic scores. He had no time to share his time with Mangalam for he was an ascetic. When Sambu Ayyar looked for a suitable bridegroom for his daughter, he faced a lot of problems in the name of dowry. He was required to pay huge money to get his daughter married to a man. Because of his kindness shown to the underprivileged people, Sambu Sasthri was eventually excommunicated from the orthodox Hindu society. Being desolate, she moves to Madras (now Chennai). The focus then shifted to Sambu Sastri's daughter Savithri who was ill treated by her "westernized" husband Sridharan and was eventually driven out of his palatial house in Calcutta. Since, Sambu Sastri had offered his ancestral home to Sridharan as dowry Savitri found herself homeless when she arrived at her native village. She gave birth to a baby girl Charu in a hospital and left her to the care of her father and continued on her wanderings. Sambu Sastri, meanwhile, along with Nallan, embarked on the Gandhian social uplift programmes including picketing liquor shops. At the end of the novel, Savitri emerged as a wealthy woman under the pseudonym Uma Rani and devoted herself to charitable activities. She eventually rejected the overtures of her husband Sridharan who wished to return to her. Finally, both of them joined the Freedom Movement to fight for the independence of India.

Abstract

In this novel, the traditional suffering of woman as an underdog has been fully expounded through the portrayal of Savithri, the protagonist of the novel. Born in such a hoary family of all positive virtues, she suffers greatly in the hands of her stepmother

Mangalam. She is born in such a remote village that she does not get a chance to learn the manners of modern education. Living with narrow, clannish and age old traditional practices and sentiments of her neighbours, she is also deprived of a chance to get exposed to the outside world. She has a father who has failed to rear her to the expectations of a modern bridegroom. Here, her sufferings and humiliations, because of being a motherless girl, can be equated to those of Jane Eyre in *Jane Eyre* who also faces humiliation and physical assault at the hands of her aunt, Mrs. Reed. Despite their troubled childhood, they become refined women with a great maturity in the later part of their lives. Her painful sufferings and sudden elevation to an affluent person make her evolve into a progressive matured woman

Savithri hopes to live happily with her husband enjoying all the worldly pleasures. But what happens in her husband's house is the reversal of her expectations. But she does not lose hope in life. Her decision to quit her marital life and live alone for the sake of her child is similar to that of Isabella who, because of her husband, Heathcliff's ill treatment, escapes the area of marriage and resolves to live for her child. These two women characters really deserve a special mention as they evolve from the mould of type to non type and emerge as a rebel against the male authority of their counterparts. Savithri's miseries in her husband's house, especially at the hands of her mother-in-law evoke sympathy in readers. Treated like a slave at the hands of her mother-in-law Thangammal, she has none to share her feeling. Ignored by her husband on the pretext of her not being fashionable, she moves like a robot in her mother-in-law's place. It is important to record here that in the patriarchal Indian society, women also attribute to the suppression of fellow women, especially in the family structure, thereby, invigorating the dominant ideology.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence_against_women>.

Initially, Savithri starts her life as a typical Tamil Brahmin woman ready to sacrifice everything for other's happiness, and then she is seen evolving into reversal mould for the

want of love and recognition. Because of the lack of human warmth and concern, she goes to the extent of leaving her child Saru to her father and boarding the train to Calcutta. Fortune favours her after reaching Kolkatta. There, by chance, she joins her wealthy aunt Meenakshi. Despair- ridden Savithri now becomes an affluent woman wielding her influence to the extent of offering five lakhs to the hospital at Chennai where she delivered her daughter, Saru. Money and status gives Savithri the power and recognition she deserves and helps her extricate legally from her marriage tie. Thus, her life from innocence to experience spans through India's freedom struggle where in the seeds of sacrifice at the domestic life alone would blossom the much cherished freedom of India. Freedom of woman is freedom of the mother land. For any woman born as a mother, sister, friend and wife, the real emancipation of her is the freedom at all levels especially in all spheres of life and elevation of socio, political and economic fields. Kalki has sown this seed of emancipation of woman in this novel and Savithri is the symbol of such emancipation.

Mangalam's existence as a wife and as a mother in Sambu Sastri's house is moulded into a tyrannical woman. She knows that Savithri is her stumbling block with a fond hope of some substantial property from his will. Conjugally and legally her plight is pathetic that has resulted in nourishing hatred in her heart against Savithri. Any woman of her status would lose balance but Mangalam does not deviate from her domestic duties. Though she extracts more work from Savithri, she does not openly grumble and complain to Sambu Sastri about her existence as a wife in his dwelling. Her mother often tries her best to ignite her passionate outburst but Mangalam remains patient. She wants her husband to realize her moral and legal reliance of existence at his pace to keep her happy.

On the day of marriage, Savithri feels so elated while Sridharan is depressed. Sridharan does not like the marriage for the simple reason that Savithri is a rustic girl with no knowledge of the nuances of city culture and fashion. He dreams of getting married to a

fashionable woman. He could not convince his greedy mother. Further, Savithri is the only daughter and so, she would get all the property after her father's demise. Finding no way to escape, Sridharan agrees to marry her. For Savithri, this marriage is her liberation-- freedom from her Chitti's (her aunt, Mangalam) inhuman treatment. Ironically, she has to bear the insults of her mother-in-law and also her husband. Savithri is subjected to harassment and untold miseries by her mother-in-law on the grounds of dowry, which establishes the fact that woman has also been playing active role to perpetuate the patriarchal ideology. This reality is well captured in a Tamil movie, *Penmani Aval Kanmani* in which, the mother-in-law both mentally and physically tortures her daughter-in-law and humiliates her parents pointing out their inability to keep their promise to pay the dowries. Further, Savithri discovers the illegal relationship of her husband with Susee. She is subjected to severe verbal abuse from her mother-in-law and physical beatings from her husband. Here, like the typical Indian woman of the time, Savithri does not question her husband for his extramarital relationship but rather patiently endures all with a hope to mend her husband. This high level of tolerance of woman actually perpetuates the patriarchal ideology and worsens their life conditions. For Thangammal (her mother-in-law), Savithri's credibility to get more and more money has started dwindling. For Sridharan, the credibility of keeping her as his wife is a matter of sacrifice about which he has no positive idea.

When Savithri returns to Nedungarai with the support from strangers she is shocked to see her house locked. When she approaches her neighbour Dikshitar, she gets only hurting replies. Her plight is really tragic. Her own people at the village do not like her presence as if she is an embodiment of contagious disease. Savithri resolves firmly not to go back to her husband and leaves for Chennai with her child. She hopes to live in this world without her husband, a man's support. Her attitude is similar to that of Isabella in *Wuthering Heights* as she quits her married life with Heathcliff and takes her child to Wuthering Heights hoping

that she could live the rest of her life for the sake of her child without her husband, Heathcliff. For both women, their male counterparts' ill-treatment and humiliation must be the cause for their leaving the area of marriage to protest themselves against their marginalised existence in the patriarchal society.

After spotting her father in Chennai and leaving her child under his care, she goes to Mumbai wherein a rich lady wants a destitute woman without any child to support her. This move is the turning point of her life that transforms her status. When women choose to decide for themselves and establish their right they can find their way to progress, though in Savithri's case it is her predicament that has changed her.

Savithri has become Umarani, a rich lady visiting Chennai to donate five lack rupees to Meenakshi hospital where she delivered her child. She becomes the sensational news at Madras. Everyone talks about her aristocracy, dignity, decorum and decency. Everyone from high and low wants to have a glimpse of her. She has inherited such a huge wealth from her aunt Meena, sister of Sambu Sastrigal who is said to have eloped with a man twelve years ago. Before her death, Meena makes Savithri her legal heir. The news about her spending a lot on matters of munificence raises the eyebrows of many. Generally rich men are known to have the tendency of giving liberally and donating freely. When they come across a woman doing so, it becomes a talk of the town. The society has seldom heard of a woman offering such a huge amount of donation. It is partly because woman would not have the scope of amassing wealth. During those times, woman would not be entitled to inherit a share of property from her father in case she had brothers. Society would consider them meek and financially dependent on men and have no moral or physical or mental courage for liberalization. Liberty for liberalization is a matter for men and labouring at home meekly is for woman.

Savithri alias Uma Rani's humanistic approach of saving her husband, Sridharan who is facing a likely imprisonment due to his misappropriation of money is comparable to Isabella's (Wuthering Heights) refusal to aid Hindley to murder Heathcliff, her husband, though she has been subjected to harassment and ill-treatment by him. Both women exhibit their religious bent of mind and typological feature of safeguarding their husbands though they don't deserve this benign approach. Patriarchal temperament very much surfaces through Sridharan who claims for the restitution of rights on Savithri whom he detested and abandoned once. The society supports his cause and affirms that a woman could not or should not live without her husband discarding conjugal relationship. Even the judiciary system is based on patriarchal ideology and the men frame the laws.

Though Savithri (Uma Rani) is docile by nature, meek in disposition, and humble in conduct she has become hard hearted now. She would have softened to a certain extent, had she received any semblance of warmth from Sridharan. Savithri could have tarnished the image of her husband and his mother but her culture taught her to remain a dutiful and devoted wife. She remains a resolute in being a self-dependent, thereby, she could seek her identity.

The father's words clearly reflect how the culture and the society had been corrupt with gender bias. Savithri breaks away from the woman's typological temperament and wages a legal war against her husband, all due to the lack of humaneness in man even after the woman tries to extend a friendly hand. This researcher deems it fit to cite a Tamil movie, *Marupadiam*, directed by late Mr. Balumahendra, a famous film maker in both Tamil and Malayalam. The heroine refuses to pardon her erratic and debauched husband though he repents for his wrongs and seeks to unite with her again in marital life. She, being stubborn and straightforward out rightly rejects his appeal and makes him realise how much she has been wounded because of his overindulging behaviour. Her temperament of self-dignity and

sense of righteousness can be compared to those of Savithri, a traditional Brahmin girl-turned a rich woman known as Uma Rani who objects to the court verdict which advises her to live with her husband, Sridharan who packed her back home when she was pregnant. Rather, she shows her readiness to pay alimony to her husband as she does not like to revive her conjugal relationship with him.

In this context, Savithri is not a product of the hoary cultural epic character Savithri who was fighting for her husband's life from the God of Death, Yama. This new woman was a metamorphosed Savithri who wants to teach her husband a lesson. She turns to the judge and makes this speech:

... Mr.Narayanan marupadi kettar, “sari, neenga sonnathellam nijamendre ninaitchukkuvom. purushan veetile neenga romba romba kastapattadhagave vatchukkuvom. aana, neengathan avarai avvalavu thooram theivamaga paavitchundirunthennu sonnele?” ippo, avar, ”ponathaiyellam maranthudalaam; purushan manaiviyaga thaampathiyam nadathalaam enru solgirapothu, ean athai marukkireergal.

Uma appothu aaveshathodu pathil sonnal. “amaam. Oru kalathil ivarai theivamaga ninaithen. vasthavamthan. appothu ennai ivarukku pidikkavillai. Ennai parpatharkkum kasappai irunthathu. nan irukkirenaa, seththenaa enru koodak kavanikkavillai. ippothu vanthu koodi vazhalamenru solgirar. etharkaga? en peril ivarukku thidirenru piriyam vanthuvittatha? illai! ennidam irukkum panathukku asaipattukkondur solgirar...

.... Uma turns to Sridharan and says, *amam; marupadiyum solren. ennidamulla panathukku asai pattukkondur than ippothu kirukasthasiramam nadatha vanthirukkilar* (270-2710).

[English translation: (Mr.Narayanan started asking a question, ok, we take what all you have said is true and we take it for granted that you were subjected to untold sufferings at your husband's place. But, you alone have said so far, you consider him as your God...! Now he says, "let us forget all about the past. Let us start afresh!" Why do you refuse? For this Uma furiously answered... Yes... I worshipped him like a God. It was true. At that time, he hated me. He felt bitter even to look at me. He did not even care whether I was dead or alive. Now he invites me to live together.. Why? How does he like me now all of a sudden? No... No... He likes to live with me because he is attracted towards my money.)]

In spite of her argument, the court finally exhorts her to start a new life with her husband mentioning that a woman cannot live her life unwed or separated from her husband in this society.

Then she turns to the judge and says:

idhu niyayama? idhu dharmama? neengale sollungal.oru pennai aval peril ishtam illatha purushanudan vazhumbadi nirppandappaduthuvathu neethiya? deivathukkuthan adukkuma? ulagamellam 'sudhanthiram,sudhanthiram' yenru muzhngikondirukkum innalil oru pen pedhaiai sattathin peral ithagaia kodumaikku alakkalama? manaiviai purushan thalli vaithal, manaivi korakudia pathiyathai yenna jevanamsam thane.anthamathiri nanum ivarukku

jevanamsam thara thayaraiirukkiren.anal ivarudan sernthu vazghuvatharkku
mattum sammathikka maatten! oru nalum maatten! (271).

[Translation follows: Is it really a justice to compel a woman to live with her husband who does not have any love for her? Will God allow it? In the name of law, how can law force an unwilling woman to live with her husband when the entire world clamours for liberty and freedom? Suppose a husband wants to get separated from his wife, he is legally bound to give his wife monetary settlement. In the similar manner, I want to get myself separated from him by means of giving him monetary settlement. But I shall never agree to live with him as his wife. That is impossible. I will never be ready to live with him even if law forces me.]

Betty Friedan avers that Liberal feminists create and support acts of legislation that remove the barriers for women. These acts of legislation demand equal opportunities and rights for women, including equal access to jobs, equal pay and unbiased legal systems. Liberal feminists believe that removing these barriers directly challenges the ideologies of patriarchy, as well as liberates women (Friedan, 1963). The judge ought to give his judgement according to the limits of legal arguments. He accepts how women are ill-treated by their in-laws and husbands. But in Savithri's case, her allegations do not bear any proof. Based on the Hindu law a woman after marriage has to live with him willy-nilly. Thereby, the verdict is given that Savithri has to live with Sridharan and her claim to get herself separated is not granted. Here, it is important to record that the man-made legal system is obviously biased to woman. The liberal feminists are known to register their protest that the societal or legal subjugation of women is wrong and it needs to be destabilized to maintain the equal status for both sexes in the society.

She takes on the patriarchal stance of joining the freedom movement. No one, not even the law could force or persuade her to live with Sridharan. She gets the satisfaction which she once longed for, out of her commitment to the cause of the nation. Savithri alias Uma Rani emerges as a strong woman challenging the patriarchal ideology by showing her readiness to pay alimony to her husband as she does not want to live with him. She has grown strong enough to argue in the court and establish her stand in not yielding to the pressure of her husband, and the court. She elevates as a progressive woman and poses a serious threat to the dominant ideology.

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